



@Shutterstock.com



@Voonik

Woollen Weaves

As we inch closer to winter, the warm woollen wear lying in our wardrobes begins to see the light of day once again, while newer trend collections too make their way to the store shelves. **Bindu Gopal Rao** explores.

It's that time of the year when the nip in the air is palpable. It is also that time when apparel manufacturers get out their warm fabrics and the season when woollen rules the roost.

There has been a spree of increasing fondness for the knitted wear market in the country. Unlike the usual designs in the usual fabrics, a range of hues and clothing materials has been introduced and is being celebrated widely.

DEMAND DRIVERS

Both knitted and non-knitted winter wear are in high demand, as they vary with the consumers' budget and lifestyle. However, knitted apparel is witnessing a faster increase in demand compared to woven apparel. Rajat Wahi, Partner, Deloitte India, says, "Lightweight knitwear is a trending category and is expected to continue its growth in the coming years as it is more fashionable as well as comfortable. Many major retailers are emphasising on cotton sweaters and lightweight sweatshirts that deliver both

fashion and functionality." With the consumer going for smarter and functional wear, the Indian woollen wear market has stepped into the era of creating a balance between style and functionality. The choices are inclining more towards garments which, along with satiating the weather conditions, are feasible to carry. Leaving behind the need-based winter market, the share of woollen wear has increased by leaps and bounds now. Ashima Sharma, owner of Ashima S Couture says, "The latest launches in woollen apparel are woollen capes and ponchos which are to be worn over a top or a sweatshirt. Also, full-length woollen dresses with appliqué patches are a western trend which will be seen trending in India too."

NEW VISTAS

The advent of year-round woollen fabrics that can be worn not only in the winters, but also in the summers is a given today. Summer fabrics made of fine wool which is lightweight and of finer

HAND-WOVEN STRIPES AND ABSTRACT PRINT STRIPES IN WEAVES ARE A MASSIVE WIN THIS WINTER.



microns are popular. "To increase market reach in an already niche segment, product re-engineering is essential. The products are made with an optimum percentage of wool, blended with poly and/or viscose in fine counts/microns. The intention is to make the drape impeccable, the finish smooth and the price affordable, catering primarily to the mass premium segments. Grado from the House of OCM has recently launched these fabrics as part of the mid-season range. The products span across superfine 90s to 140s poly/wool/viscose blends," says Vikram Mahaldar, MD, OCM. Finishes/treatments are applied to woollen fabrics to further enhance the performance of the product, such as the machine washable finish which is especially treated with a polymer to improve the after wash appearance. Wrinkle resistance is given through a chemical treatment that has a strong covalent bond, which replaces the weaker hydrogen bonds and gives more stability to the fabric. Aroma treatment on fabrics (particularly for special occasions) is coated with nano-capsules and emanates the respective fragrance.

NOW TRENDING

Hand-woven stripes and abstract print stripes in weaves are a massive win this winter. This season could also be called aloud as 'the season of blends and mixes'. Garments in cashmere mixed with wool, silk and linen are the newest launches in town. In terms of shirting, cotton shirts with

flannel finish are also in vogue. Today, woollen wear has gone beyond the cliché jerseys. "The modern gentleman now is as precise as never before. Be it a casual day, a gathering or the wedding day, new heights of creating trends are touched at every aspect. Talking about the trends for this winter, it is all about asymmetrical cuts and blends of prints and embroideries. Detailing in terms of embroideries and quirky patterns is becoming a must. Talking about accessories, grooms are going for shawls instead of the regular stoles with sherwanis, thus adding a little quirk yet class," says Saggur Mehra, Creative Director at House of Sunil Mehra. Consumers are moving towards a more versatile wardrobe space—the blazer has taken the prime role in a variety of occasions. "Although it is something that everyone wears, its importance is even more emphasised in the consumer's wardrobe now. The new age urban customer is also seen shifting from off-the-shelf jackets to a more customised/tailed solution. Blazers can be worn with contrast trousers and shirts to office, and worn down with a pair of jeans and sneakers and a t-shirt for an evening out. Another top trend is superfine 140s woollen shirting fabrics and kurta fabrics in fine wool blends, which are the top sellers in the northern and eastern parts of India," adds Mahaldar.



INDIA'S WOOL AND WOOLLEN INDUSTRY CAN BROADLY BE DIVIDED INTO 10 MAJOR PRODUCT CATEGORIES.



NUMBER CRUNCHING

Nidhi Jain Mishra, Industry Relationship Manager, JD Institute of Fashion Technology says, "The woollen industry has a massive potential to grow and provide employment. There is a huge market for kids' wear and trendy, casual wear. Uniforms also constitute a huge chunk of the market share. Brands like Raymonds, Monte Carlo and Duke are trying to innovate and offer new product lines that satisfy consumers' tastes in the ever-changing fashion world. With urbanisation, higher disposable incomes and more inclination towards western wear, the market share of woollens in India is expected to grow at nine per cent to reach ₹32,000 crore by 2023. According to a report in India Retailing, "The winter wear market in India was pegged at ₹17,011 crore in 2016. The market is expected to demonstrate a compound annual growth rate of six per cent to reach a size of ₹29,422 crore by 2026. Currently,

the unbranded segment commands a market share of nearly 70 per cent, with the branded segment trying to bridge the gap by innovating and offering new products." India's wool and woollen industry can broadly be divided into 10 major product categories—worsted yarn, woollen yarn, woollen tops, fabrics, shoddy yarn, shoddy fabrics, blankets, knitwear, handmade carpets and machine-made carpets. The above-mentioned increase in market share by the year 2023 spans across the segments of woollen blazers, sweaters, caps, mufflers, scarves and leggings, across men's wear, women's wear and kids' wear. Moreover, India's wool consumption is estimated to increase almost twofold by 2019-20. Bhavya Chawla, Chief Stylist, *Voonik.com* adds, "The US and the EU are the key importers of Indian wool and wool-blended products. India is the seventh largest producer of wool in the world with a global production share of nearly 1.8 per cent. India's wool consumption was estimated at 135 million kg. This is expected to increase to 260 million kg by 2019-20. The wool industry is concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Punjab accounts for about 35 per cent of the wool production units, followed by Maharashtra and Rajasthan."





CHALLENGES

The increasing trends and lifestyle preferences have given a threshold to the wide competition in the market which is the biggest challenge, ultimately. "Competition refers to a structure wider than just the flow of capital. A set comprising assortments, designs, availability of the required fabric and hitting the right consumer with the desired choices creates the thread of competition in the market," says Mehra. Wool prices are on the increase because of low production in Australia, high demand in China and the weakened Indian currency. There has been a noticeable shift from woollen to cotton/acrylic in the knits/sweater category across the industry, and for fabrics the shift has been from worsteds to PV (mainly imported from China and made in India). These 'look-alike' woollen products are bought by the consumer because of low product awareness and the unorganised segment offering consumers heavy discounts. Wool is a natural insulator—having a moisture absorbency of 13 per cent. This makes it suitable for both winters and summers. However, the consumer awareness for this is low. Primarily only the north of the country faces cold winters and buys woollen products for a three-month period, only to fulfil utilitarian needs. "The Indian woollen wear market is dominated by the unbranded segment due to lower prices and a wider range of products. The segment also procures new, innovative and cheaper products through grey imports from China and Thailand. These generally attract consumers due to their trendy designs and low prices, thus making it difficult for bigger brands to penetrate the market. For brands to heighten their share, they need to be innovative and work on a unique product line which can be offered at a competitive price point," says Chawla.

THE INCREASING TRENDS AND LIFESTYLE PREFERENCES HAVE GIVEN A THRESHOLD TO THE WIDE COMPETITION IN THE MARKET WHICH IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE, ULTIMATELY.



The Indian woollen wear market is becoming increasingly fashion-oriented. Once a market for basic sweaters, cardigans and shawls, it is now catering to consumers' demand for more stylish apparel along with comfort and warmth. There are more designs in a variety of fabrics and blends that help the customers make a fashion statement.

STYLE FILE

- Plaid ruffle scarves
- Woollen fringe tops
- Woollen coordinates
- Batwing sleeve sweaters
- Long turtleneck pullovers
- Woollen crop tops
- Woollen tunic tops
- Woollen wrap tops
- Woollen trousers/pants for men and women
- Indo-western jackets
- Nehru jackets for men. ■